

# Subcommittee on Federal Lands

Tom McClintock, Chairman  
Hearing Memorandum

March 14, 2017

To: All Members, Subcommittee on Federal Lands

From: Majority Staff – Terry Camp & Brent Blevins, Subcommittee on Federal Lands  
(x6-7736)

Hearing: Oversight hearing on “*Identifying Innovative Infrastructure Ideas for the National Park Service and Forest Service*”

---

The Federal Lands Subcommittee will hold an oversight hearing entitled “*Identifying Innovative Infrastructure Ideas for the National Park Service and Forest Service*” on March 16, 2017, at 10:00 a.m. in 1324 Longworth House Office Building. During this hearing, the Subcommittee will hear testimony from witnesses regarding the infrastructure needs of the National Park Service (NPS) and Forest Service (USFS) and innovative ways to finance needed improvements, reduce federal costs, and decrease the time necessary to complete construction and rehabilitation projects.

## **Policy Overview**

- In total, NPS manages 417 units across the system encompassing more than 84 million acres in every state, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.
- As the mission of NPS expanded and the footprint of the National Park System enlarged, NPS became increasingly unable to fund necessary maintenance projects. NPS currently estimates that its deferred maintenance backlog stands at nearly \$12 billion.
- The USFS manages 193 million acres of land in 155 National Forests and 20 National Grasslands in 44 states and territories – almost 10 percent of the continental U.S. land base.<sup>1</sup>
- As the mission of the USFS expanded well beyond the initial mission to properly manage the forests for current and future generations, our national forests became plagued by insects & disease and catastrophic wildfire, and the USFS significantly reduced access to recreational opportunities.
- Due to misplaced priorities, inadequate funding and expensive, time-consuming red tape, the USFS’s maintenance backlog tops \$5.2 billion.

---

<sup>1</sup> Forest Service Snapshot, Forest Service FY 2017 Budget Justification

- With the national debt climbing higher by the day, funding even the most critical maintenance projects becomes difficult without finding new and innovative ways to plan, process, implement and pay for these projects.

### **Invited Witnesses**

*Mr. Reed Watson*

Executive Director, Property and Environment Research Center  
Bozeman, Montana

*Mr. Gordon Cruickshank*

District 2 Commissioner, Chair  
Valley County, Idaho

*Mr. Deny Galvin*

Former Deputy Director, National Park Service  
Advisor, The Coalition to Protect America's National Parks  
McLean, Virginia

*Mr. John Palatiello*

President, Business Coalition for Fair Competition  
Reston, Virginia

### **Background**

#### *National Park Service*

The NPS administers the National Park System, which covers nearly 85 million acres and includes 417 units valued for their natural, cultural, and recreational importance. Last year, NPS celebrated its 100th anniversary. As the NPS enters its second century of promoting and protecting our National Parks, it faces considerable challenges, chief among them being its substantial deferred maintenance backlog. NPS defines deferred maintenance as maintenance of assets not performed when it should have been and is delayed for a future period. NPS's backlog of deferred maintenance, estimated for Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 (the most recent year available), at \$11.93 billion.<sup>2</sup>

As NPS has taken on new responsibilities and Congress has voted to add new units to the National Park System, NPS fell behind on necessary maintenance. Despite agency efforts to address the backlog through improved asset management, the backlog continued to grow over the past decade. From Fiscal Year 2006 through Fiscal Year 2015, the NPS spent roughly \$10.5 billion on maintenance projects, and yet the backlog continued to increase.<sup>3</sup>

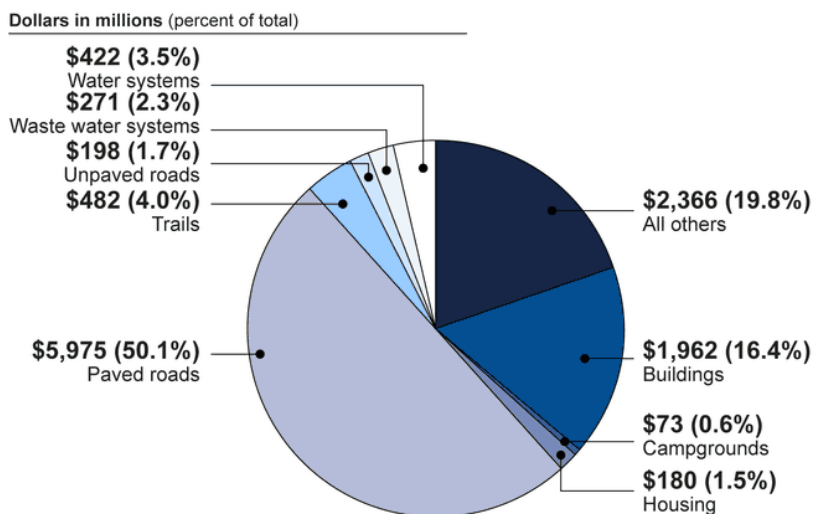
---

<sup>2</sup> Laura Comay. "National Park Service: FY2017 Appropriations and Recent Trends." Congressional Research Service. August 2, 2016.

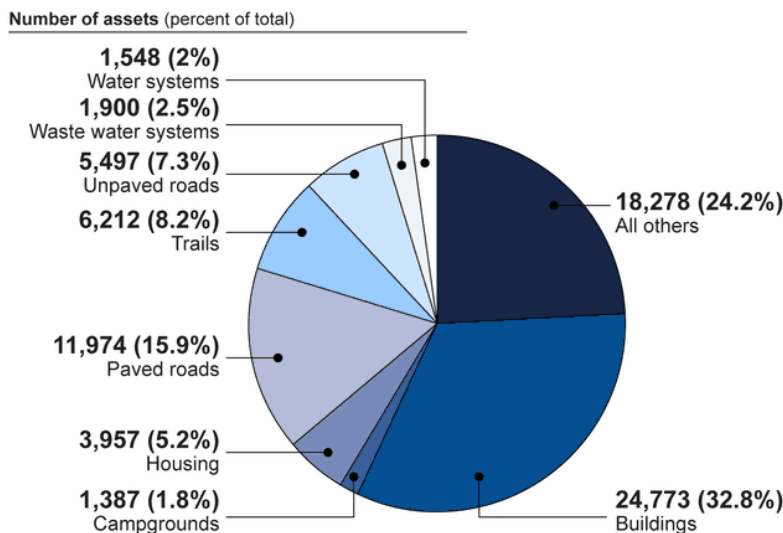
<sup>3</sup> Government Accountability Office. "National Park Service: Process Exists for Prioritizing Asset Maintenance Decisions, but Evaluation Could Improve Efforts." GAO-17-136. Dec 13, 2016. Accessed March, 10, 2017. "<http://www.gao.gov/assets/690/681581.pdf>"

Beginning in FY 2015, NPS began funding projects based on the Department of the Interior’s Capital Investment Strategy, which prioritizes projects based on a variety of factors including total visitation and visitor impact. While this system focuses funding on the highest-priority assets, this constrained focus will potentially result in continued deterioration of less-critical assets, thereby increasing deferred maintenance costs overall. Additionally, a GAO study published in December, 2016, regarding the new Capital Investment Strategy noted: “The Park Service does not have a plan or time frame for evaluating whether the Capital Investment Strategy has been successful.”<sup>4</sup>

The table below shows a breakdown of the NPS deferred maintenance as of FY 2015:



Source: GAO analysis of National Park Service deferred maintenance data. | GAO-17-136



Source: GAO analysis of National Park Service asset management data. | GAO-17-136

<sup>4</sup> Government Accountability Office. “National Park Service: Process Exists for Prioritizing Asset Maintenance Decisions, but Evaluation Could Improve Efforts.” GAO-17-136. Dec 13, 2016. Accessed March, 10, 2017. “<http://www.gao.gov/assets/690/681581.pdf>”

NPS funding to address deferred maintenance comes from discretionary appropriations and from other sources. Two appropriations subaccounts (one under Construction and the other under Operation of the National Park System) partially address deferred maintenance. Allocations from the Highway Trust Fund are used for NPS road repair and improvements. Other sources of funding come from recreation fees.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to congressional appropriations for deferred maintenance, NPS took a variety of other actions to finance deferred maintenance projects including: 1) using philanthropic donations, 2) working with volunteers, 3) engaging partner groups, 4) expanding concessions operations, 5) partnering with states for transportation grants, and 6) leasing properties. Despite these efforts, new and innovative ideas for financing deferred maintenance projects, lowering federal costs, and expediting necessary planning and compliance are necessary to ensure the long-term sustainability of the National Park System.

### *Forest Service*

The USDA Forest Service manages 193 million acres of land in 155 National Forests, 20 National Grasslands and 8 National Monuments in 44 states and territories – almost 10 percent of the continental U.S. land base.<sup>6</sup> Within this area, the agency manages 442 wilderness areas encompassing 36 million acres. The USFS is entrusted with a multiple-use sustained yield mission and claims activities on USFS lands contribute \$36 billion to America's economy each year and support nearly 450,000 jobs.<sup>7</sup> Since the 1980's and 1990's, the USFS witnessed a rapid decline in timber harvesting. This decline significantly impacted the USFS's road system, much of which was funded through timber sales. As a result, rural areas have reduced economic activity, degraded roads, less access to the national forest and worse, reduced access to fires by firefighters.

The USFS owns a variety of assets beyond timberland, including recreation facilities, roads, dams, communications equipment, and administrative facilities. The USFS let much of this infrastructure and equipment fall into disrepair. For example, the agency claims more than \$3.2 billion in deferred maintenance for roads alone, including \$443 million in critical needs, such as bridge and culvert replacement. Additionally, only 25% of trails within the National Forest System are up to national standards.<sup>8</sup>

Below is a breakdown of the USFS's maintenance backlog:

---

<sup>5</sup> Comay, Laura. "National Park Service: FY2017 Appropriations and Recent Trends." Congressional Research Service. August 2, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Forest Service Snapshot, Forest Service FY 2017 Budget Justification <https://www.fs.fed.us/sites/default/files/fy-2017-fs-budget-overview.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Forest Service Snapshot

<sup>8</sup> Forest Service FY 2017 Budget Justification. <https://www.fs.fed.us/sites/default/files/fy-2017-fs-budget-justification.pdf>

Deferred Maintenance by Asset Class as of September 30, 2015			
Asset Class	Critical <sup>1</sup>	Non-critical <sup>2</sup>	Total
Bridge	\$38,481,576	\$166,550,778	\$205,032,354
Building	52,511,704	1,096,321,559	1,148,833,263
Dam	8,924,308	28,716,853	37,641,162
Fence	255,980,737	383,891	256,364,628
Handling Facility	21,858,292	21,797	21,880,089
Heritage	3,684,400	20,435,912	24,120,312
Minor Constructed Features		90,754,486	90,754,486
Roads <sup>3</sup>	325,000,000	2,673,000,000	2,998,000,000
Trail	3,276,365	275,430,865	278,707,230
Trail Bridge	3,393,435	5,727,676	9,121,111
Wastewater System	15,808,887	15,063,342	30,872,228
Water System	46,954,572	45,251,681	92,206,254
Wildlife, Fish, and TES	4,537,218	1,969,418	6,506,635
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$780,411,494</b>	<b>\$4,419,628,258</b>	<b>\$5,200,039,752</b>

<sup>1</sup> Critical Deferred Maintenance: Deferred maintenance that results in a serious threat to public health or safety, a natural resource, or the ability to carry out the agency mission.

<sup>2</sup> Non-critical Deferred Maintenance: Deferred maintenance that results in a potential risk to public or employee safety or health, compliance with codes, standards, regulations, and so forth; or needs that address potential adverse consequences to natural resources or mission accomplishment.

<sup>3</sup> The roads deferred maintenance amount is for passenger-car roads (Levels 3 through 5). Maintenance Level 1 and 2 roads have been classified as stewardship assets.